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SUBJECT: MEDIA COVERAGE OF PDAS KURT VOLKER VISIT

¶1. Summary: PA organized a TV interview and a roundtable with journalists for PDAS Kurt Volker on January 17 in The Hague. All media emphasized Volker's "moderate" approach and reported positively his statement that the US is not pressuring the Dutch. They noted his assertion that former Ambassador Paul Bremer's comments about "punishing" the Netherlands do not reflect U.S. policy. Media also took note of his comment that the ISAF III mission would proceed without the Dutch if necessary, with another NATO member filling the proposed Dutch role. End summary.

¶2. TV COVERAGE

January 17, 10:00 p.m. NOS news (813,000 viewers) report opens with the interviewer's voiceover that senior US official Kurt Volker said that if the Netherlands does not want to participate in ISAF III, NATO would have to look for another partner to do the job. He adds that Volker is the umpteenth senior US official visiting the Netherlands to brief MPs on the mission to southern Afghanistan.

Voiceover continues: D66 opposes the mission, but D66 MP Bert Bakker happily raised a glass at the residence of the American Embassy. The commentator noted that MPs and military experts were invited for a briefing on Afghanistan and the possible Dutch mission.

On camera Volker says the mission in Afghanistan is a terrific opportunity for assisting the Afghan people. "We're contributing to this and we hope to increase our contribution to it. I know Dutch parliament is considering this now but it is a decision for the members of parliament to make."

Asked what would happen if the Netherlands does not participate, Volker explains that ISAF is a NATO mission and that they are determined to make the mission succeed. "I'm sure they will look for another partner if the Dutch are not able to participate."

Confronted with Paul Bremer's recent statements that there would be economic consequences if the Netherlands did not participate, Volker says Bremer was speaking for himself and not for the US government. "This is about helping the Afghan people and how we as allies can work together to do this."

They report Volker says the situation [in Uruzgan] is not too dangerous to start reconstruction, though he noted you can not draw a clean line between reconstruction and security missions because there are terrorists in the area.

News program NOVA (640,000 viewers) intersperses Volker's remarks with those of politicians in a story on the broader political debate. Politicians comment favorably on Volker's statement that Paul Bremer was not speaking for the U.S. government.

¶3. PRINT COVERAGE

National dailies (DE VOLKSKRANT, ALGEMEEN DAGBLAD, TROUW, and NRC HANDELSBLAD), fifty regional papers (through the news service GPD or ANP), and news agencies ANP and AP reported the roundtable.

Sample headlines:

DE VOLKSKRANT: "Senior Diplomat Came to Mainly Listen" (1/18)
ANP: "No American Pressure on Dutch Decision" (1/18)
TROUW: "Americans Say They're Not Applying Pressure" (1/18)
NRC HANDELSBLAD: "US Diplomats on Uruzgan Mission: Netherlands Should Also Fight Terrorism" (1/18)

Following are excerpts from print media reports:

ANP notes, "Volker now says there is no pressure at all. If the Netherlands would not participate then NATO would be

looking for another country to fill that gap. Volker said about Bremer: 'He wrote a book and he has to promote that. He is now a private citizen and is not speaking on behalf of the American government.' Volker also indicated that the Netherlands should take into account the possibility of casualties in the province of Uruzgan. 'If there were no risks there, the troops would not be necessary.' He also said that in Operation Enduring Freedom, the American hunt for al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters, 'does not have any geographical borders.' That means that the Americans could operate in areas where the Dutch are working on a reconstruction mission. A mix-up of these two missions is the big fear of parties in the Second Chamber such as the PvdA, D66, Green Left, and SP."

DE VOLKSKRANT headlines, "Senior Diplomat Came to Mainly Listen" and writes, "To provide further information and mainly listen: that was the slogan for the lightning visit that Kurt Volker, American Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, paid to The Hague. The US 'does not

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want to put any pressure' on the Dutch debate about the planned mission to Afghanistan, said the American diplomat. Volker met with officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the evening he had dinner with Members of Parliament and military experts. Volker's direct chief, Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried, said last week in DE VOLKSKRANT that he was amazed by the "overheated" debate in the Netherlands. Volker did not use such words. He clearly distanced himself from the clear warning issued by Paul Bremer, former administrator in Iraq (and former US Ambassador to the Netherlands). Bremer talked about possible damage to the Dutch interests should the Netherlands not participate in the Uruzgan mission. Volker said, "Bremer is a private citizen now and certainly does not speak on behalf of the American government. We do not spend our time punishing allies." Volker said he does not see any tension between the mainly American Operation Enduring Freedom, which is aimed at hunting for terrorists, and the NATO stabilization mission. "Security and reconstruction go hand in hand."

NRC HANDELSBLAD carries a front-page January 18 report, "US Diplomats on Uruzgan Mission: Netherlands Should Also Fight Terrorism," which combines Volker's comments with those of US Ambassador to NATO Victoria Nuland. NRC reports PDAS Volker said in a meeting with journalists that there should be a "synergy" between Operation Enduring Freedom and the ISAF mission in the province of Uruzgan. It includes Ambassador Nuland's comment in a BBC radio program that she expects a contribution from the Dutch "in fighting insurgents."

PvdA MP Koenders says in the article that separation of the two missions is essential to his party. Koenders also says that Volker did not repeat the "synergy statement" during a dinner with MPs. Fighting insurgents, according to the Dutch government, is absolutely not the ISAF task. But the Cabinet does leave room for the possibility of Dutch participation in preventive attacks at armed groups.